



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

February 26, 2003

The Honorable Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney
Chair, House Higher Education Committee
Post Office Box 40600
304 John L O'Brien Building
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Kenney,

We are writing to you in support of House Bill 1852, relating to facilitating collaboration among health care work force stakeholders to address the health care personnel shortage, scheduled to be heard before your committee today.

We had the opportunity to participate in the Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force, convened at your and other legislator's request by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. Our primary interest in the health workforce shortages is due to the State Board of Health's Committee on Health Disparities findings and report of May 2001 (available at www.doh.wa.gov/sboh). The committee found that:

- The number and percentage of ethnic and minority health care professionals are seriously underrepresented when compared to the overall population of the State;
- Not all health care professional shortages are uniform across the state – underserved, minority and rural communities are likely to feel this shortage more acutely and for longer periods;
- Health professionals from underserved communities, both minority and rural, are much more likely to return to and serve those communities.
- Research demonstrates that minority providers may be more effective in addressing cultural, linguistic and trust issues that exist for many minority patients. What is more, health outcomes can be improved when the race and ethnicity of health professionals reflects the populations they serve.

Because of these findings, the Board views the goal of recruiting more racially and ethnically diverse youth and adults as an opportunity to improve health care access, health care quality and health outcomes while reducing health workforce shortages.

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We would like to emphasize the importance of collecting data on the number and diversity of health professions students and how the health workforce reflects the diversity of the populations served. This needs to be assessed periodically in order to evaluate the impact of our efforts to improve diversity and reduce shortages.

House Bill 1852 would facilitate continued collaboration among health care work force stakeholders in establishing and maintaining a strategic plan to address this important health and economic issue. The data collection and analysis system proposed in the bill would enable measuring and evaluating the number and diversity of the health care workforce. Reporting to the governor and legislature would encourage accountability among stakeholders.

House Bill 1852 would build on past work of the Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force. Including the goal of recruiting racially and ethnically diverse youth and adults is likely to lead to improved health care quality and health outcomes, as well as reducing health care workforce shortages.

Sincerely,



Linda Lake, M.B.A.
Chair, Washington State Board of Health



Vickie Ybarra, R.N., M.P.H.
Member, Washington State Board of Health

cc: House Higher Education Committee Members
Representative Shay Schual-Berke
Washington State Board of Health Members
Bryan Wilson, WTECB
Madeleine Thompson, WTECB
Mich'l Prentice Needham, Governor's Executive Policy Office